



The Fortune Society  
BUILDING PEOPLE, NOT PRISONS

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To Whom It May Concern:

I have worked with Jose Geronimo-Figuerroa as his teacher and education coordinator since he enrolled in services at the Fortune Society in January of 2013.

Before I outline the progress that Jose has made in the last two months working with us, let me share with you what the Fortune Society's mission is. For more than 40 years, the Fortune Society has worked to create a world where all who are incarcerated or formerly incarcerated can become positive, contributing members of society. We do this through a holistic, one-stop model of service provision that includes: Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI), drop-in services, employment services, education, family services, health services, housing services, substance abuse treatment, transitional services such as the Rikers Island Discharge Enhancement (R.I.D.E.) program (now I-CAN), recreation, and lifetime aftercare.

Jose enrolled in the education program as soon as he arrived to our doors in Long Island City, eager to be a student in one of the more challenging classes that we offer, the Young Adult Literacy (YAL) class. Most of our classes meet Monday through Thursday, 10am to 1:45pm. After class, students that are not court-mandated leave. Those that are court-mandated usually participate in a group but are gone by 3pm.

The YAL class that Jose was accepted into has high expectations of its students not only because of its additional class time commitment, students being required to be in class Monday through Friday at the above-mentioned time schedule. They are also required to participate in after-class projects and internships, at an additional 6-hours-per-week. The YAL class requires that students apply to it unlike our other classes. Jose, like others accepted, wrote a very moving autobiographical essay and submitted a reference letter as well. Jose thoroughly completed the application, submitted it on time and made a great impression in the interview.

Today, Jose maintains perfect attendance and is on task in class completing all his assignments on time and with enthusiasm. His stellar participation has made him eligible for the project phase of the class of which he's actively engaged in. The 5 students including Jose working on that project are attending visits to the Museum of Modern Art and to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, chaperoned by me, and are engaged in a poster design assignment that builds on their photo editing/graphic art/computer skills.

Jose is also closely working with Ruthie Arroyo after his class commitment spending several hours a week assisting her in her office and administrative duties. He's always on time, meticulous in completing tasks and very eager to take on more duties. Other students look up to him for the initiative he takes to change his life, becoming a role model not only for what he's endured in life but for the positive ideas he shares in class and with the sensitivity that he expresses in the process.

Next week, Jose is scheduled to embark on a more intensive internship within the Fortune Society. He'll be interviewing with several departments here to see which one fits with his skill set and possible careers he's aspiring to. Opportunities such as these, in class and in projects and internships, give students like Jose insight and a sense of hope into opportunities that they never thought possible for themselves. Jose often has expressed to us and to his classmates how he never imagined learning to be as fun and as natural, as right, as it is at the Fortune Society. He's always showing us his gratitude for the effort we've put into his progress and for us giving him this opportunity. The reality is that Jose makes it easy. More students should be like him.

Next week, Jose will be post-testing in reading and math so we'll be able to have more concrete scores to share with you then, based on that standardized assessment tool. He'll also be encouraged to take his Official GED Practice Test to get a sense of whether he's ready to take the test or not.

As this winter cycle comes to an end on March 21, Jose will be a candidate to apply for a Culinary Arts training that will be facilitated in partnership with Kingsborough Community College and the Fortune Society. Young adults, like Jose, will engage in this training for 3 weeks and then with an additional week of training, will be able to take their food handlers certification test. Jose, because of his diligence and level of commitment to our programs, is a prime candidate and is eager to enroll.

On behalf of all my colleagues in the youth programs, we wholeheartedly look forward to working with Jose in the future. If you have any questions, you may contact me.

Sincerely,

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